INDONESIA'S CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL PROBLEMS

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Indonesia's contemporary political problems should be viewed within the framework of the country's need for an overall development. This means that development should not be limited to the economic field only, however important this field is. One should bear in mind that an imbalance of development and growth between the various fields (economic, social, political and cultural) might eventually result in destruction of those fields which have been built up.

One reason for a need of an intentional build-up in the political field is the political heritage left by former president Sukarno which, coupled with the attempted coup of the Communists in Indonesia in 1965, has practically resulted in a destruction of the political system of Indonesia. In order to make up for this drawback, political develop^Lment should therefore be built up anew. It should be remembered that the political consciousness of the people in the modern sense has only recently been awakened, beginning at the earliest perhaps since the second decade of the present century which means that it was started during the colonial period. This consciousness had not been spread to all the people at large and to all parts of the country at the same rate and intensity, and even in the independence period it has not yet successfuly penetrated the grass root level.

The New Order, i.e. the post Sukarno order, has adopted the opinion that what is needed in Indonesia is a political system which is stable but at the same time dynamic. This was reflected in the various seminars held in 1966 and the latest at a seminar in early 1970. A stable political system is considered favorable for economic development. The failure of Indonesia's economic development in the first half of 1950 was considered due to the absence of this stability factor as was reflected in the many changes of the cabinet at that time. On the other hand, a dynamic political system which is to articulate the wishes of the people and to absorb changes in society will hopefully be favorable for stability as well as for the continuation of economic development.

In spite of this agreement about the general character of the political system to be realized in Indonesia, its implementation has however not been without difficulties. Lately doubts about the possible success of the New Order have even arisen, at least if the necessary

steps to be taken are still lacking. Indeed it should also be remember-
ed that the agreement can only be realized smoothly if differences of
values and interests can be kept to a minimum.

Of the many problems which Indonesia has to face I want to select
three of them for discussion: 1) the problem of democracy, 2) the
problem of inter-religious relationship and 3) the problem of civil-
military relations.

Problem of Democracy

When in 1966 the students of Djakarta and many other big cities
in Indonesia marched in the streets to carry out their extra-parliamentary
actions, i.e. demanding the ban of the Communist Party, a change in
the government and the reduction of prices so that the people at large
would be able to live reasonably, their demand implied the implemen-
tation of "real" democracy. Whatever was meant by this term, it was
certainly not similar to Sukarno's guided democracy of the late fifties
and the first half of the sixties which had more and more been trans-
formed into a kind of dictatorship thereby neglecting the stipulations
made in the constitution. The New Order considers that the required
political system which fits into the above demands is nothing else
than democracy.

One who is acquainted with Indonesia's history and society can
easily enumerate those factors which can fortify the implementation
of democracy. On the other hand, one can also point to factors which
might hamper the development of democracy in the country.

The supporting factors for the implementation of democracy include
geography, diversity of *adat* (customary law), ethnic, religions and beliefs.
These factors have indeed contributed toward the establishment of a
pluralistic rather than a monolithic society. Other factors include the
age-old custom of deliberation (*musjawarah*) in the villages and the
traditional cooperative life (*gotong royong*). In the modern period the
introduction and development of science mold, hopefully, an individual
into an independent, creative and critical personality and thus has
helped develop the growth of democracy, at least potentially.

The retarding factors to democracy include the remnants of In-
donesian feudalism which formerly divided society into two distinctive
segments, i.e. the selected people on the one hand who were recognized
to have particular rights and privileges, and the common people on
the other, who were supposed to have every duty to serve the former.
This means that at the time of feudalism the status of a person was
ascriptive rather than acquired or achieved. It could only be changed
through violence as evidenced by past history. In modern times this
status-oriented attitude has perhaps easily created neo-feudalism in the
country.

In addition there still exists the traditional clan and kinship system which also views the individual dependent on his ascriptive status. The result is a strong feeling of attachment to his relatives, sometimes to such an extent that considerations of national character give way to this primordial feelings.

It can easily be understod that traditional relationship such as reflected in the feudal and kinship system promotes personalized leadership. Whoever is considered the leader is followed with more or less personal attachment. The history of parties in Indonesia has shown many occasions when a leader easily quits his party and sets up a new one for the simple reason that he has numerous following from his old party and not because of differences of principles, such as ideology and program.

Another weakening factor to democracy is the fact that the Indonesian people often turn to mystics in facing difficulties in life. The strategy of non-cooperative parties in the Dutch colonial period which has often been continued after independence has also contributed to the retarded development of democracy. Introduced by Sukarno in colonial times this strategy demanded from his following the binding together of all powers and the direction of them against the Dutch. It views life as in a state of war in which man is regarded by another as a friend only if the former is in sympathy with the latter, and as a foe if the former is against the latter. The strategy therefore easily creates an intolerant attitude toward any opposition and a state of suspicion toward each other.

As this strategy was reintroduced by former president Sukarno in the second half of the fifties, it can easily be understood what kind of political atmosphere Indonesia was then facing internally. In the early sixties parties which were against the President were banned, and political leaders who had a great following were arrested without due process of law. A suspicious attitude from one grouping toward another was created. After the coup attempt it has not been easy to change this atmosphere into a healthy one. Traces of this suspicious attitude are still present.

What course democracy in Indonesia will take in the future depends much on the attitude, policy and efforts of existing political groupings, including the armed forces and the political parties, as well as the government. Perhaps it will depend more on the kind of leadership the present government is offering, whether this leadership is to enhance the fortifying factors or whether it will promote unconsciously the contrary.

In addition to what has been said above about democracy, two more characteristics of Indonesia's democracy are worth consideration. The first is concerned with the voting system. So far in representative

assemblies in Indonesia decisions are taken on the basis of *mufakat* (consensus), none of the members officially dissenting from the agreed decision. However, it is still a question whether all the participants fully support the decision or whether at least some of them merely pay lip-service to this consensus. In an atmosphere where one is expected to agree with what is considered a matter of consensus, one might have the feeling of being forced to adopt an agreeable standpoint in order not to be accused of becoming a kill-joy. Lately voices have already been raised to abandon the *mufakat* system of decision making and introduce again the ordinary voting system.

The second question is concerned with the oncoming 1971 general elections. The present electoral law does not reflect a dynamic system at all, but seems to endorse the present political status-quo: only existing parties can participate in the elections, while each of them is guaranteed at least one seat in parliament, even if according to the normal calculation they are not eligible for even one seat. Another law, i.e. on the composition of parliament, stipulates the appointment of quite a number of parliamentary members by the government.

In spite of this status-quo oriented electoral law, many are of the opinion that any election is better than no election at all.

Perhaps one has to point out in this connection that Indonesia is still in a period of transition during which the bases for a sound democratic system are being laid. The construction of these bases cannot be done all at once. It takes time.

Problem of Inter-religious Relationship

Although Indonesia is regarded as a Muslim country with about 90% of the population embracing Islam, other beliefs cannot be neglected. Among the Muslims themselves traces of animistic and Hindu-Buddhist beliefs have left their impressionistic marks. The same traces can be observed among the Christians.

In the last two decades a rise of Hindu-Buddhism has been observed while Christianity, Protestantism or Catholicism, which was regarded during the Dutch period as a religion having close association with the colonial regime, has made a tremendous upsurge in the number of followers as well as the number of churches built, especially after the failure of the Communist coup in 1965. In missionary activities Christians have indeed been better off materially than Muslims. Followers of the Christian religion are in general also well ahead economically and educationally than the Muslims. They have also been able to create trust within the circles of the former Sukarno as well as the present Suharto government.

On the other hand, part of the Muslims, especially former Masjumi leaders, became estranged from the government while they feel that

in matters of general policy, especially vis-a-vis the Communists, they
have been in full agreement with the Suharto regime. It can therefore
easily be understood if in some parts of the Muslim community ill-
feelings and frustration can be observed which sometimes flare up in
the form of clashes with the Protestants and Catholics. It should be
added that this flare-up has been of limited character.

In Indonesia this question of inter-religious relationship has be-
come acute due to the existing different viewpoints on the separation
between religion and the state. Starting from around 1930 this pro-
blem was originally debated between secular and religiously oriented
nationalists. Proponents among the former included Sukarno, the latter
Natsir who later headed the Masjumi party. It is interesting to note
that the secular nationalists were in general also Muslims. They cham-
pioned the separation of religion and the state, while the religiously
oriented nationalists advocated the contrary. Both sides seemed to trans-
plant this Middle Age problem of the West and the Turkish problem
faced by Kemal Attaturk in the twenties and thirties in Indonesia's
soil thereby identifying religion as the Church.

In the independence period, especially in the fifties, both sides still
made reference to this problem as one which should be given prime
attention, resulting in a more or less permanent cleavage within the
community. The secular nationalist group understandably has been
supported by Protestants and Catholics. Although later on the problem
has subsided following the recognition of Pantjasila by all parties and
groupings as the basis of the state, it has not been completely obliterated.
That the problem still exists is reflected *inter alia* by the present efforts
in regrouping the existing parties into what is called the Developmental
Group (*Kelompok Pembangunan*) on the one hand, and the United
Group (*Kelompok Persatuan*) on the other, the former comprising all
the non-Islamic parties, the latter the Islamic parties. It should be
added, however, that this regrouping has been only at an initial stage.

Within the framework of this problem of inter-religious relationship,
Communism as a worldly religion might be mentioned. However, it
should be remembered that Communism in Indonesia is still banned,
but its potential role should not be neglected.

Problem of Civil-Military relationship

In Indonesia this problem of civil-military relationship centers around
the problem of what is called the "dual" function of the military.
Until about the end of the fifties the military had been kept to its
ordinary activities of military role, but afterwards it played a role
in activities which previously had been solely within the realm of
civilians.

Various reasons have been mentioned to justify this expansion of the role of military. It is said that the inabilities of the political parties to run the government properly, i.e. to launch economic development, when they had the opportunity to do so in the first half of the fifties was the prime reason for inviting the military to exercise its dual function. It is also said that bickerings on the basis of the state, Pantjasila, constituted another reason. Revolts in various areas in 1958 in which regional commanders were involved had also contributed. Some argue that former president Sukarno needed the expansion of the military role in civil activities in order to counter-balance the Masjumi leadership and later the PKI. And finally the 1965 Communist coup attempt has established this role of the military more firmly than in all the previous years.

Whatever the reason, it is indeed an established fact that the military plays in Indonesia a dual role, a military as well as a civilian role. There are of course pros and cons toward this.

What is more important is to assess what kind of possibilities there exist in the future in this question of civil-military relationship. It is certain that the military will still have a decisive role in poltical matters for a number of years ahead. The question is therefore whether, together with other forces in society, it will be able to build up a stable and dynamic political system as has been mentioned above.

Confining ourselves to the military this depends on the question to what extent they themselves commit to this cause. One can argue that in the past even if there were weaknesses within the political parties, there needed not be an interference in civilian life from the military if the latter was able to refrain from this intereference, or at least to remain behind the scene and just putting pressure if necessary, thereby playing the role of an ordinary pressure or interest group. If politics is considered a field in which only civilians are to play a direct role, a failure of one segment of civilians (e.g. a party or a coalition of parties) does not necessarily lead to a collapse of the country, or to a state in which coups after coups are launched, for another group of civilians can take its place in leadership. But if the military fails in politics, what will then happen? For different from the parties the military are all armed with a result that differences of opinion can easily lead to a flare up of hostilities; force rather than deliberation will then be the means for settlement.

In the future there is a need for a clarification as to the gradual limitation of the dual role of the military. This might constitute a guide not only for the military themselves but also for society as a whole so that an atmosphere of certainty can be created which is necessary to enhance participation of society as a whole in the process of development. One should have in mind that development can only

be successful if all layers and groupings of the population, or at least the greater part of them, give their support. The gradual limitation can also serve as a means for the prevention of various excesses of the dual role.

A united stand on the side of the military toward this commitment also constitutes a condition for the enhancement of their positive role in the political build-up. It will prevent any possible sabotage by one section to the overall cause. It will also prevent any possible temptation to uphold the present status-quo.

Of course no less important is the ability of the civilians them-selves, especially the political parties. Will they be able to create trust within society, within military circles, so that it is they whom one can turn to in order to develop the country economically, politically, socially and culturally? This trust will promote their return to an in-creased positive role in politics thereby realizing the limitation of the military dual role. In other words, it will promote the realization of democracy in the country.

Conclusion

I have selected three of the most important problems which Indonesia is facing now. These three problems lie more in the field of political theory although practical considerations have been interpolated. If one looks solely at the practical needs of the country in politics, two most important questions immediately thrust themselves to the fore which also serve as a primary condition for political as well as economic development.

The first is the problem of corruption. Early this year the students came down into the streets again demanding from the government drastic actions against this national epidemic. The President made a positive response by appointing the so-called Four-man Commission and by appointing former vice-president Mohammad Hatta who is respected by almost all parts of the population except the Communist, to become his advisor in the problem of corruption as well as adviser to the Four-man Commission. The Commission, who has only an advisory capacity, has made recommendations to the President to take repressive and preventive measures against corruption. It also considers its work finished by the end of June. It is thus up to the government to take the necessary actions.

Parliamentary circles have also asked the government to reveal the result of the Four-man Commission.

All this shows how much society is concerned with the problem. A neglect on the part of the government might result in an apathetic attitude in society which in its turn will exercise a negative effect to

the development plan. Participation in the development plan depends thus much on the ability of the present government to hold the trust which it enjoyed in the early years of the New Order era.

The second problem is the rule of law. That corruption still constitutes a problem is an indication of how weak the rule of law is. It is also felt that violations of human rights have been reported sometimes "in the name of development". Society's support to development can only be expected if society feels that it is protected by law. The rule of law implies a creative legislative process as well as an independent role of the judiciary power, independent from the executive as well as from the forces in society.

Will Indonesia be able to solve the above problems? Will she succeed in the development? She has been able to overcome many of her difficulties in the past. With all her positive potentialities, let us hope that she will do so in the future